

## **Title:** Panning for Gold

**Objectives:** To experience gold panning; To provide a fun culminating experience; To introduce the concept of “supply and demand.”

### **Materials:**

Lead shots that have been pounded flat and spray painted gold.

Wide, shallow, water tight container.

Sandbox sand

Metal pie pans (to work as gold pans).

**Time:** At least 1 hour.

### **Lesson Description:**

1. Set up stations; Make “gold nuggets” by pounding lead shots so they are slightly flattened. Spray paint the shots with gold paint. Pour the sand into the shallow, broad bottomed container (the plastic sweater boxes which are approximately 3’x2’x6” work well). Mix gold nuggets into the sand. Fill the container with water, leaving at least an inch of water over the top of the sand. (You may want to first place the container on a tarp to catch any spilt water.)

2. Announce:

*Guess what? Great news! Last night while you were sorting through hundreds of letters looking for yours, I started talking with an old-timer who is disgusted with his prospects. He’s offered to sell half of his claim to us for only a sack of flour and some bacon. What should we do folks? It seems like a pretty good offer. The best part is he’s been digging all winter long and has a pile of paydirt ready for us to put through the sluiceboxes. He thinks it is worthless. Do you think we should give it a try?*

2. Students will definitely want to buy the claim. Show them the panning station you've set up in the back of the room. The more panning stations you can create, the quicker the students can cycle through.

If your class didn't see the panning demonstration at the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park you'll want to demonstrate how to pan for gold. Scoop a small amount of "paydirt" into the pan. While tilting the lip of the pan into the water, swirl the water around the pan using a circular motion. The sand will slowly wash away while the heavier "gold" pieces will be left behind.

3. While students are called back to pan for gold, lead a discussion about what makes something valuable:

*The miner's offer to sell his claim for some flour and some bacon is historically accurate. There is documentation of a miner making such an offer. Once we arrived in Dawson we heard of people paying \$18 for a dozen eggs. Back in Seattle we could have purchased 9 suits of underwear for \$18. There are stories of people paying \$1 just to hear a weeks old newspaper read aloud and of miner's using gold nuggets to pay for drinks and to tip the dance hall girls. Can you imagine?! In Seattle the gold nuggets could have purchased fine clothing, vehicles, or expensive jewelry, in Dawson it is paying for a single drink. What is going on?*

Allow for student response. Guide the discussion so that students begin to see that what is considered valuable depends on what is available and plentiful versus what is wanted or unavailable (supply and demand). The following questions may help:

*-Why are miner's using gold nuggets to pay for things and not paper money?*

*-How is it that a dozen eggs can cost \$18 when they are only worth 30 cents in Seattle?*

*-Why was gold considered so valuable in Seattle and other parts of the nation yet treated very casually in Dawson?*

4. Wrap up the lesson by having the class create a statement about supply and demand (using their own words, of course) to explain the phenomena they discussed.



Mercer Island School District

